

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #627
Fox Hunting: Britain's Most Controversial Tradition
18th Aug, 2026

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Transcript

[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today is the second part of our three-part mini-series on unusual British traditions.

[00:00:29] In part one, we looked at Punch and Judy, the strange puppet show that became one of the most recognisable traditions of the British seaside. In part three, next up, we'll be zooming in on the seaside itself, and talking about the rise and fall of the British seaside holiday.

[00:00:49] But in today's episode, part two, we are talking about something completely different.

[00:00:55] It's more violent, more [controversial¹](#), and also illegal.

[00:01:00] And that is fox hunting.

¹ causing strong disagreement

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[00:01:02] This is not just a story about whether British people like foxes. It is a story about social class, the city vs the countryside and where to [draw the line](#)² between preserving tradition and [tolerating](#)³ unnecessary [cruelty](#)⁴.

[00:01:20] So, let's not waste a minute and get right into it.

[00:01:26] In 1981, Disney released a film called the Fox and the [Hound](#)⁵. It told the story of an unlikely friendship between a fox and a dog, following them from when they were young puppies playing together, to the [realisation](#)⁶ that they were being brought up to be enemies.

[00:01:48] It was the most expensive animated film ever made at that point, and, as it was a Disney film for kids, everything ended well. Nobody really gets hurt, and everyone lives happily ever after.

[00:02:04] Forty-five years later, another fox-and-[hound](#) story is still [played out](#)⁷ in dozens of villages across the English countryside. But this version is much darker.

² decide what is acceptable and what is not

³ allowing or accepting

⁴ hurting or causing pain

⁵ a dog used for hunting

⁶ the moment they understood it

⁷ happening or acted out

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[00:02:19] It starts happily enough, with a crowd of people gathered in a field or outside a pub, most [on horseback](#)⁸.

[00:02:29] They wear black or red coats, white [breeches](#)⁹, and [polished](#)¹⁰ black boots.

The smell of horses is in the air. There is a pack of forty or fifty dogs [milling around](#)¹¹. A glass of port, strong, [fortified](#)¹² wine, is handed up to each rider in the [saddle](#)¹³.

[00:02:50] The steam of breath on cold winter air. A horn sounds, and the humans, dogs and horses [thunder off](#)¹⁴ across the muddy fields.

[00:03:03] You might think it all sounds perfectly [harmless](#)¹⁵ so far.

[00:03:07] What happens next is not so [harmless](#).

⁸ riding a horse

⁹ short riding trousers

¹⁰ cleaned until shiny

¹¹ moving around with no clear direction

¹² made stronger; here, wine with extra alcohol

¹³ the seat on a horse

¹⁴ leave very fast and noisily

¹⁵ not dangerous; not causing hurt

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[00:03:11] The dogs, [all being well](#)¹⁶, will pick up the scent of a fox. They will [relentlessly](#)¹⁷ follow the scent, chasing the fox across fields, [ditches](#)¹⁸ and woods, until it cannot run any more. The pack of dogs will then [pounce on](#)¹⁹ the fox, [ripping](#)²⁰ it to pieces.

[00:03:32] It is no fairytale ending. It is also illegal, and has been for more than twenty years.

[00:03:40] So, why is it still [tacitly](#)²¹ allowed, where does it all come from, and why do some people resist the government's attempts to restrict it so fiercely?

[00:03:53] To answer those questions, we have to go back several hundred years.

[00:03:58] Now, foxes have always been a [nuisance](#)²² to farmers. They [sneak in](#)²³ during the night and kill their chickens. They kill lambs in the lambing season.

¹⁶ if everything goes as planned

¹⁷ without stopping

¹⁸ long narrow holes in the ground

¹⁹ jump on suddenly

²⁰ tearing or cutting apart

²¹ without saying it openly

²² something that causes problems

²³ enter quietly and secretly

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[00:04:10] They are clever, hard to trap, and [prolific](#)²⁴, in other words, there are lots of them.

[00:04:17] So, for as long as people have been keeping [livestock](#)²⁵ in the British Isles, they have been killing foxes. This killing was, for the most part, practical; farmers, [gamekeepers](#)²⁶, and [shepherds](#)²⁷ did it with traps, with poison, and with packs of dogs. It was [pest control](#)²⁸, not "sport".

[00:04:41] And in any case, for most of the medieval and early modern period, hunting for sport, for enjoyment, was the [preserve](#)²⁹ of the [aristocracy](#)³⁰, those at the top of society.

[00:04:56] And the beast you hunted was deer.

²⁴ producing many babies

²⁵ farm animals

²⁶ people who looked after wild animals on private land

²⁷ people who looked after sheep

²⁸ killing or removing animals that caused problems

²⁹ special area or domain

³⁰ those at the top of society

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[00:05:01] Kings, dukes, and [aristocrats](#)³¹ kept enormous private deer parks, and to hunt a [stag](#)³², the male deer, was the [privilege](#)³³ of the elite.

[00:05:14] The fox, by comparison, was [vermin](#)³⁴. Hunting a [lowly](#)³⁵ fox was something a farmer might do to protect his sheep or chickens.

[00:05:24] Hunting a [majestic](#)³⁶ [stag](#) was something a king did.

[00:05:29] This all started to change in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it changed because of two things.

[00:05:38] The first was that the deer population started to [collapse](#)³⁷.

[00:05:43] Centuries of hunting meant that by 1700 or so, the great deer [herds](#)³⁸ of medieval England were largely gone; the [aristocrats](#) had killed most of them.

³¹ those at the top of society

³² a male deer

³³ a special right or advantage

³⁴ animals seen as dirty or harmful

³⁵ low in importance or status

³⁶ grand and impressive

³⁷ fall or fail badly

³⁸ groups of animals

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[00:05:55] The second change was the landscape itself. England used to be full of forests and woods, which provided the natural [habitat](#)³⁹ for deer.

[00:06:07] Much of this had been cut down to make way for agricultural land, for fields. And then in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was something called [enclosure](#)⁴⁰, and this transformed the English countryside one step further.

[00:06:25] What this meant was that these big open fields were divided into smaller [patches](#)⁴¹ of farmland, divided by neat [hedgerows](#)⁴² and [ditches](#).

[00:06:38] This just so happened to be almost perfect [terrain](#)⁴³ for a different kind of hunt. A hunt that involved [galloping](#)⁴⁴ [flat-out](#)⁴⁵ across country, jumping over [hedges](#)⁴⁶ and [streams](#)⁴⁷, and following a fast-running animal across miles of open ground.

³⁹ the natural home

⁴⁰ dividing open land into private fields

⁴¹ small areas of land

⁴² lines of bushes between fields

⁴³ type of land

⁴⁴ running fast, for a horse

⁴⁵ as fast as possible

⁴⁶ rows of bushes

⁴⁷ small rivers

[00:06:57] And that animal was the fox.

[00:07:02] There was one more thing [in the fox's favour](#)⁴⁸, at least from the hunter's point of view.

[00:07:08] A female deer, or a doe, typically has between one and three babies per year.

A female fox, or a [vixen](#)⁴⁹, will typically produce four or five babies, or [cubs](#)⁵⁰, every spring. And in some cases, many more, sometimes ten or more.

[00:07:29] What this meant was that a hunt could ride out every Saturday of the season, kill a fox each time, and the fox population would [scarcely](#)⁵¹ notice.

[00:07:41] To the huntsman, this made the fox both a [worthy adversary](#)⁵² and effectively unlimited in supply.

[00:07:52] Now, fox hunting in its modern form is traditionally [credited to](#)⁵³ one man: a Leicestershire landowner named Hugo Meynell.

⁴⁸ helpful for the fox

⁴⁹ a female fox

⁵⁰ baby foxes

⁵¹ hardly; almost not

⁵² a good and difficult enemy

⁵³ said to be created by

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[00:08:04] In 1753, at the age of eighteen, Meynell took over a pack of **hounds**⁵⁴ at Quorndon Hall, and over the next half-century he **supposedly**⁵⁵ transformed fox hunting.

[00:08:18] He **bred**⁵⁶ faster, more athletic **hounds**. He trained them to follow the scent of a fox at speed. He **pioneered**⁵⁷ the kind of long, hard, cross-country chase that became the model for every hunt that followed.

[00:08:36] Now, some modern historians have **pushed back**⁵⁸ a little on this story, saying that the **neat**⁵⁹ tale of Meynell as the lone genius who invented fox hunting is probably a little **exaggerated**⁶⁰.

⁵⁴ dogs used for hunting

⁵⁵ people say so, but it may not be true

⁵⁶ produced animals by choosing parents

⁵⁷ did it first or helped start it

⁵⁸ disagreed with it

⁵⁹ simple and tidy; here, too simple

⁶⁰ made to seem bigger or more important than it is

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[00:08:49] Whether it was Meynell alone, or whether he simply became the face of something that was already happening all over the country, it doesn't really matter [for the purposes of](#)⁶¹ our story.

[00:09:01] The important thing to understand is that by the early 1800s the basic shape of the thing we now call fox hunting was [in place](#)⁶².

[00:09:12] And by the time we get to the Victorian era, the hunt had become something much more than a country [pursuit](#)⁶³.

[00:09:21] It had become an [institution](#)⁶⁴.

[00:09:26] Each hunt had a [defined](#)⁶⁵ territory, sometimes covering several counties.

[00:09:32] Each had a Master of [Foxhounds](#)⁶⁶, who was the senior figure, often a wealthy local landowner.

[00:09:41] Each had a professional staff in charge of the dogs and horses.

⁶¹ for what we need here

⁶² existing; ready

⁶³ an activity; here, something people did for pleasure

⁶⁴ an important long-lasting part of society

⁶⁵ clearly described or fixed

⁶⁶ dogs used for hunting foxes

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[00:09:46] The hunt had its own [kennels⁶⁷](#), its own [stables⁶⁸](#), its own [subscription⁶⁹](#) system, even its own dinner club.

[00:09:55] It also had its own clothing. Senior figures wore a [scarlet⁷⁰](#) coat, which, for reasons no one can quite agree on, is traditionally called "hunting pink".

[00:10:09] Most riders wore black or navy.

[00:10:13] Fox hunting also had its own vocabulary. Foxes were not called male and female. They were dog foxes and [vixens⁷¹](#). The fox's tail was a brush.

[00:10:28] The animals chasing the fox were never called dogs.

[00:10:31] They were a pack of [hounds](#), with names and ranks.

[00:10:36] The huntsman did not call them with a [whistle⁷²](#). He called them with a horn and with hunting cries like "tally-ho" and "gone away".

⁶⁷ places where the dogs lived

⁶⁸ places where the horses lived

⁶⁹ money paid regularly for participation

⁷⁰ bright red

⁷¹ female foxes

⁷² a small tool making a high sound and used to call or signal

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[00:10:47] The hunt also had its own [ritual](#)⁷³. The [meet](#)⁷⁴, where the hunt gathered, which was usually in front of a village pub or a country house.

[00:10:57] The stirrup cup, which is the small glass of [port](#)⁷⁵ or [cherry brandy](#)⁷⁶ passed up to each rider in the [saddle](#).

[00:11:06] The blessing of the [hounds](#). The blowing of the horn. The first cast across a field, meaning the first time the [hounds](#) were sent out across a field to try to catch the scent of a fox.

[00:11:19] And it could be a long day too.

[00:11:22] A day's hunting, from start to finish, could last six or seven hours. The [hounds](#) would be sent out across a field, picking up the scent of a fox.

⁷³ a regular ceremony or custom

⁷⁴ a gathering before a hunt

⁷⁵ a strong, sweet, red wine

⁷⁶ a strong alcoholic drink made with cherries

[00:11:33] The hunt would [gallop](#)⁷⁷ after them, often for miles, over [hedges](#) and [ditches](#) and walls. Riders would fall. Horses would [go lame](#)⁷⁸. A fox might be killed at the end of it, or might escape into a wood or down a [drain](#)⁷⁹.

[00:11:51] Then the hunt would move on to a new patch of country and start again. By the end of the afternoon the riders would be cold, tired and muddy. They would get off the horses, perhaps gather back at the pub, eat, drink, and tell stories about the day.

[00:12:12] And hunting was not an activity for everyone; fox hunting was [overwhelmingly](#)⁸⁰ an upper-class and [rural](#)⁸¹-middle-class pursuit. A subscription to a hunt was expensive. The horse, the [kit](#)⁸², the time off work mid-week or on a Saturday: all of it cost money.

[00:12:33] Farmers were welcomed, because the hunt rode across their land. But the masters of [foxhounds](#), the people who actually ran the hunts, these were almost always the people who owned the big country houses and the fields around them.

⁷⁷ run fast, for a horse

⁷⁸ become unable to walk properly due to an injury

⁷⁹ a pipe or hole where water went away

⁸⁰ very strongly; by a large amount

⁸¹ connected with the countryside

⁸² clothes and equipment

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[00:12:50] Now, even back in the Victorian era, it had its [fair share](#)⁸³ of [detractors](#)⁸⁴. In the 1890s, Oscar Wilde famously [summed up](#)⁸⁵ the English fox hunt, calling it "the [unspeakable](#)⁸⁶ in full pursuit of the [uneatable](#)⁸⁷".

[00:13:09] In other words, all these ridiculous people chasing something that you don't even eat at the end of it.

[00:13:15] The whole thing existed [for its own sake](#)⁸⁸; it was pointless.

[00:13:20] By the late nineteenth century, Wilde was not alone in finding it strange. A growing number of people, particularly in the cities, were beginning to think that the violent killing of an animal for enjoyment had no place in a civilised country.

[00:13:39] And people started [vocally](#)⁸⁹ [opposing](#)⁹⁰ it, calling for it to be banned.

⁸³ a normal or large amount

⁸⁴ people who criticised it

⁸⁵ described briefly

⁸⁶ very bad or unpleasant

⁸⁷ something not good to eat

⁸⁸ only because people wanted to do it

⁸⁹ openly and loudly

⁹⁰ disagreeing with; fighting against

[00:13:46] The first serious organised opposition dates back to 1925.

[00:13:52] In that year, a group of campaigners [founded](#)⁹¹ the League for the [Prohibition](#)⁹² of Cruel Sports, which is today known simply as the League Against Cruel Sports.

[00:14:05] Its early efforts focused on softer popular targets: like hunting rabbits with dogs, hunting otters or stags. These efforts had some success, and [laid the groundwork](#)⁹³ for the idea that fox hunting wasn't [untouchable](#)⁹⁴.

[00:14:22] But it would take another generation for that idea to translate into direct action.

[00:14:31] In 1958, members of the League laid false scent trails to [disrupt](#)⁹⁵ a [stag](#) hunt in the West Country.

[00:14:41] In other words, they put fake smells that would trick and confuse the hunting dogs, committing the first modern act of "hunt [sabotage](#)⁹⁶". This proved to be very

⁹¹ started; created

⁹² official banning or not allowing

⁹³ prepared the way

⁹⁴ impossible to criticise or change

⁹⁵ stop it from happening normally

⁹⁶ secretly damaging or stopping something

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effective, and groups [sprang up](#)⁹⁷ throughout the country, groups that became known as "sabs", short for [saboteurs](#)⁹⁸.

[00:15:03] They would arrive at hunting meets with horns, whistles, and bottles of false scent. They would try to confuse the [hounds](#), distract the huntsmen, and [steer](#)⁹⁹ the hunt away from any actual fox.

[00:15:19] In response, the hunts would [close ranks](#)¹⁰⁰, push the [saboteurs](#) away, and complain to the police about people [trespassing](#)¹⁰¹ on private property.

[00:15:30] On bad days, the two sides [came to blows](#)¹⁰². People were injured. In the 1990s, two [saboteurs](#) were killed while trying to prevent a hunt.

⁹⁷ appeared quickly

⁹⁸ people who tried to stop it

⁹⁹ guide or direct

¹⁰⁰ join together to protect each other

¹⁰¹ going onto private land without permission

¹⁰² started fighting physically

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[00:15:44] Meanwhile, public opinion was [shifting](#)¹⁰³. By the 1990s, [opinion polls](#)¹⁰⁴ regularly showed that a clear majority of British people wanted hunting with [hounds](#) banned.

[00:16:01] And in 1997, Tony Blair and Labour won a [landslide](#)¹⁰⁵ general election. Although it was only a small part of the [manifesto](#)¹⁰⁶, Labour had promised to hold a vote on whether hunting with dogs should be banned.

[00:16:17] But... nothing happened.

[00:16:20] The fox hunting question sat there for the next seven years, without anything being done.

[00:16:28] In those years, the hunting debate became one of the most unusual political battles in modern British history.

¹⁰³ changing

¹⁰⁴ surveys asking people what they thought

¹⁰⁵ a very big election win

¹⁰⁶ a list of promises from his political party

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[00:16:37] On the surface, it was about something that affected almost nobody's daily life. It was an incredibly [niche¹⁰⁷](#) activity, with a tiny [fraction¹⁰⁸](#) of the population doing it.

[00:16:51] And yet it produced more [parliamentary¹⁰⁹](#) debate, more political anger, and more street protest than most other [domestic¹¹⁰](#) issues of the time.

[00:17:01] As to the question of why, well, it was partly because it had become a [stand-in¹¹¹](#) for a much bigger argument about rural and urban Britain.

[00:17:14] To many in the countryside, where hunting was more broadly supported, the proposed ban felt like a city-based government attacking a way of life it did not understand, and [interfering¹¹²](#) in a tradition that didn't affect them.

¹⁰⁷ small and specialised

¹⁰⁸ a small part

¹⁰⁹ connected with Parliament

¹¹⁰ inside the country

¹¹¹ something that represented it

¹¹² getting involved when not wanted

[00:17:32] They argued that hunting was not simply a hobby for [aristocrats](#). They said it supported rural jobs, helped manage fox numbers, kept [hounds](#) and horses in work, and formed part of the [social fabric](#)¹¹³ of village life.

[00:17:50] In 2002, there was a huge demonstration through London, with four hundred thousand people [descending on](#)¹¹⁴ the capital in support of hunting. At the time, it was one of the largest political demonstrations London had ever seen.

[00:18:10] And the demonstration was not really just about hunting. It was about everything that rural Britain felt the new government was getting wrong: rules on shooting, the closure of village post offices, falling farm incomes, the broad and bitter sense of being looked down on by a [metropolitan](#)¹¹⁵ political class that did not understand country life.

[00:18:35] And to many in the cities, fox hunting simply had no reason to exist. It was unnecessarily cruel, terrifying a fox into running for its life until it grew tired and was [ripped to shreds](#)¹¹⁶ by a pack of dogs. This simply shouldn't be legal in a civilised society, they said.

¹¹³ the relationships and activities that held a community together

¹¹⁴ arriving in large numbers

¹¹⁵ connected with a big city

¹¹⁶ torn into many small pieces

[00:18:59] Various [bills](#)¹¹⁷ came forward, were debated, were [amended](#)¹¹⁸, and were sent back to be debated again. The House of Commons had a huge Labour majority. It voted again and again for a total ban. The House of Lords had many hunt [sympathisers](#)¹¹⁹, and it blocked the bills every time.

[00:19:22] And by the way, if you'd like to learn more about what that all means, and how the British political system works, I'd recommend episode number 592, as that goes into all of that in great detail.

[00:19:36] Eventually, in 2004, the government did something it almost never does.

[00:19:44] It [invoked](#)¹²⁰ a mechanism that allows the House of Commons to [overrule](#)¹²¹ the House of Lords and pass a bill without their [consent](#)¹²². The Hunting Act was only the seventh piece of [legislation](#)¹²³ in nearly a century to be passed in this way.

¹¹⁷ proposed laws

¹¹⁸ changed, especially in writing

¹¹⁹ people who supported the idea

¹²⁰ used officially

¹²¹ reject a decision and replace it

¹²² agreement or permission

¹²³ laws

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[00:20:03] The Act made it illegal to hunt wild mammals with dogs in England and Wales, with a small number of narrow [exemptions¹²⁴](#), mostly for [pest control](#).

[00:20:15] It [came into force¹²⁵](#) on the 18th of February 2005.

[00:20:21] Fox hunting was, for the first time in history, illegal.

[00:20:27] But if you had thought this would have meant the hunts would have stopped, no no.

[00:20:33] The morning after the ban [came into force](#), the hunts went out as usual. Their message was clear: the tradition would continue.

[00:20:45] Technically, what they did was something new. It was "trail hunting".

[00:20:51] A scent was laid in advance along a route across the countryside, typically the [urine¹²⁶](#) of a fox.

[00:20:58] The [hounds](#) were then released to follow the scent.

[00:21:03] The horses, the red coats, the horn, the meet, the stirrup cup: all of it carried on as before.

¹²⁴ special cases where the rule did not apply

¹²⁵ started to be law

¹²⁶ liquid waste from the body

[00:21:10] In theory, the chase was now only after a trail, an [artificially](#)¹²⁷ laid smell.

[00:21:18] And if a real fox happened to be in the way and the [hounds](#) chased it down, well, that was an unfortunate accident.

[00:21:27] Critics were not convinced. It was a [ruse](#)¹²⁸, they said. Trail hunting was simply fox hunting by a different name. Anti-hunting groups [stepped up](#)¹²⁹ the pressure, monitoring hunts, filming them, and reporting incidents where they believed a real fox had been killed.

[00:21:48] Even the police were [blunt](#)¹³⁰ about it. A senior officer described trail hunting as, and I'm quoting directly here, a "[smokescreen](#)¹³¹" that "gives people the opportunity to carry on hunting, as they always said they would when the ban came in twenty years ago".

¹²⁷ not naturally; made by people

¹²⁸ a trick

¹²⁹ increased

¹³⁰ direct and honest

¹³¹ something used to hide the truth

[00:22:07] There were [prosecutions](#)¹³²; people taken to court and [convicted](#)¹³³, but the punishments were typically light: a fine of a few hundred pounds or a police [caution](#)¹³⁴.

[00:22:20] For nearly two decades, then, the hunts, or rather the trail hunts, continued in this way.

[00:22:27] That was, until earlier this year.

[00:22:31] In March 2026, the British government announced that trail hunting itself was to be banned.

[00:22:40] It was a commitment in the Labour government's [manifesto](#). And on the 26th of March, the Animal Welfare Minister, Baroness Sue Hayman, opened a public [consultation](#)¹³⁵ on exactly how to bring the new ban into force.

[00:22:57] As of the time of recording, the findings haven't been published, but the [loophole](#)¹³⁶ that has kept fox hunting alive for twenty years looks [highly likely](#)¹³⁷ to be closed.

¹³² legal cases against people accused of crimes

¹³³ found guilty

¹³⁴ an official police warning

¹³⁵ asking people for their opinions before a decision

¹³⁶ a gap in the rules that let people avoid them

¹³⁷ very probable

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[00:23:09] It is bad news for the men in red coats.

[00:23:13] But if you are a fox, it might just be very good news indeed.

[00:23:20] OK, then, that is it for today's episode on fox hunting, the second of our three-part mini-series on unusual British traditions. Next up, in the third and final part of the mini-series, it'll be the rise and fall of the British seaside holiday.

[00:23:36] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode.

[00:23:39] What do you think about fox hunting? Are there similar traditions in your country, and what does the future [have in store](#)¹³⁸ for them?

[00:23:47] I would love to know, so let's get this discussion started. You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:23:59] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:24:04] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

¹³⁸ have prepared or planned

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Controversial	causing strong disagreement
Draw the line	decide what is acceptable and what is not
Tolerating	allowing or accepting
Cruelty	hurting or causing pain
Hound	a dog used for hunting
Realisation	the moment they understood it
Played out	happening or acted out
On horseback	riding a horse
Breeches	short riding trousers
Polished	cleaned until shiny
Milling around	moving around with no clear direction
Fortified	made stronger; here, wine with extra alcohol
Saddle	the seat on a horse

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Thunder off	leave very fast and noisily
Harmless	not dangerous; not causing hurt
All being well	if everything goes as planned
Relentlessly	without stopping
Ditches	long narrow holes in the ground
Pounce on	jump on suddenly
Ripping	tearing or cutting apart
Tacitly	without saying it openly
Nuisance	something that causes problems
Sneak in	enter quietly and secretly
Prolific	producing many babies
Livestock	farm animals
Gamekeepers	people who looked after wild animals on private land
Shepherds	people who looked after sheep
Pest control	killing or removing animals that caused problems

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Preserve	special area or domain
Aristocracy	those at the top of society
Aristocrats	those at the top of society
Stag	a male deer
Privilege	a special right or advantage
Vermin	animals seen as dirty or harmful
Lowly	low in importance or status
Majestic	grand and impressive
Collapse	fall or fail badly
Herds	groups of animals
Habitat	the natural home
Enclosure	dividing open land into private fields
Patches	small areas of land
Hedgerows	lines of bushes between fields
Terrain	type of land

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Galloping	running fast, for a horse
Flat-out	as fast as possible
Hedges	rows of bushes
Streams	small rivers
In the fox's favour	helpful for the fox
Vixen	a female fox
Cubs	baby foxes
Scarcely	hardly; almost not
Worthy adversary	a good and difficult enemy
Credited to	said to be created by
Hounds	dogs used for hunting
Supposedly	people say so, but it may not be true
Bred	produced animals by choosing parents
Pioneered	did it first or helped start it
Pushed back	disagreed with it

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Neat	simple and tidy; here, too simple
Exaggerated	made to seem bigger or more important than it is
For the purposes of	for what we need here
In place	existing; ready
Pursuit	an activity; here, something people did for pleasure
Institution	an important long-lasting part of society
Defined	clearly described or fixed
Foxhounds	dogs used for hunting foxes
Kennels	places where the dogs lived
Stables	places where the horses lived
Subscription	money paid regularly for participation
Scarlet	bright red
Vixens	female foxes
Whistle	a small tool making a high sound and used to call or signal
Ritual	a regular ceremony or custom

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Meet	a gathering before a hunt
Port	a strong, sweet, red wine
Cherry brandy	a strong alcoholic drink made with cherries
Gallop	run fast, for a horse
Go lame	become unable to walk properly due to an injury
Drain	a pipe or hole where water went away
Overwhelmingly	very strongly; by a large amount
Rural	connected with the countryside
Kit	clothes and equipment
Fair share	a normal or large amount
Detractors	people who criticised it
Summed up	described briefly
Unspeakable	very bad or unpleasant
Uneatable	something not good to eat
For its own sake	only because people wanted to do it

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Vocally	openly and loudly
Opposing	disagreeing with; fighting against
Founded	started; created
Prohibition	official banning or not allowing
Laid the groundwork	prepared the way
Untouchable	impossible to criticise or change
Disrupt	stop it from happening normally
Sabotage	secretly damaging or stopping something
Sprang up	appeared quickly
Saboteurs	people who tried to stop it
Steer	guide or direct
Close ranks	join together to protect each other
Trespassing	going onto private land without permission
Came to blows	started fighting physically
Shifting	changing

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Opinion polls	surveys asking people what they thought
Landslide	a very big election win
Manifesto	a list of promises from his political party
Niche	small and specialised
Fraction	a small part
Parliamentary	connected with Parliament
Domestic	inside the country
Stand-in	something that represented it
Interfering	getting involved when not wanted
Social fabric	the relationships and activities that held a community together
Descending on	arriving in large numbers
Metropolitan	connected with a big city
Ripped to shreds	torn into many small pieces
Bills	proposed laws
Amended	changed, especially in writing

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Sympathisers	people who supported the idea
Invoked	used officially
Overrule	reject a decision and replace it
Consent	agreement or permission
Legislation	laws
Exemptions	special cases where the rule did not apply
Came into force	started to be law
Urine	liquid waste from the body
Artificially	not naturally; made by people
Ruse	a trick
Stepped up	increased
Blunt	direct and honest
Smokescreen	something used to hide the truth
Prosecutions	legal cases against people accused of crimes
Convicted	found guilty

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Caution	an official police warning
Consultation	asking people for their opinions before a decision
Loophole	a gap in the rules that let people avoid them
Highly likely	very probable
Have in store	have prepared or planned

Language spotlight

1. Draw the line

- **Meaning:** To decide what is acceptable and what is not acceptable; to set a limit or boundary.
- **Synonyms:** set a limit, establish a boundary, set boundaries
- **Antonyms:** allow everything, accept anything, be lenient
- **Examples:**
 - The government had to **draw the line** between protecting animal welfare and respecting traditional practices.
 - Parents often struggle to **draw the line** between giving their children freedom and keeping them safe.

2. Close ranks

- **Meaning:** To come together as a group to support each other, especially against criticism or opposition from outsiders.
- **Synonyms:** unite, stick together, support each other, stand together

- **Antonyms:** betray, abandon, divide, turn against each other
- **Examples:**
 - When the government announced the hunting ban, the hunting community **closed ranks** and refused to accept it.
 - After the scandal was exposed, the company's executives **closed ranks** and refused to speak to the media.

3. Ripped to shreds

- **Meaning:** Severely criticised or harshly judged; torn into small pieces (literally or figuratively).
- **Synonyms:** harshly criticised, heavily attacked, torn apart, strongly condemned
- **Antonyms:** praised, complimented, admired, supported
- **Examples:**
 - The politician's speech was **ripped to shreds** by journalists and the opposition party.
 - His controversial book was **ripped to shreds** by critics, though some readers enjoyed it.

4. For its own sake

- **Meaning:** Done simply for the purpose of doing it, without any practical benefit or useful reason; done purely for enjoyment or tradition.
- **Synonyms:** for no practical reason, without purpose, purely for enjoyment
- **Antonyms:** for a reason, with purpose, for practical benefit
- **Examples:**
 - Oscar Wilde criticised fox hunting, saying it existed **for its own sake** with no real value or purpose.
 - Some people exercise **for its own sake** because they enjoy it, not because they want to lose weight.

5. Have in store

- **Meaning:** What will happen or what someone will receive in the future; what is coming ahead.
- **Synonyms:** awaiting, coming, ahead, in the future, destined to happen
- **Antonyms:** in the past, already happened, behind
- **Examples:**

- The podcast presenter ended by suggesting that a ban on trail hunting would be good news for foxes and bad news for what the future **has in store** for hunters.
- Nobody knows what the future **has in store** for us, but we can prepare ourselves for different possibilities.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. According to the episode, why did deer hunting become less common by around 1700?

- a) Deer became protected by law
- b) The deer population had fallen greatly
- c) People stopped liking deer meat
- d) Foxes started attacking deer

2. Why were foxes traditionally seen as a problem by farmers?

- a) They killed chickens and lambs
- b) They destroyed houses
- c) They ate crops
- d) They scared horses

3. What was a “stirrup cup”?

- a) A place where hounds were kept
- b) A special shoe worn by horses
- c) A prize given to the best huntsman
- d) A small drink given to riders before the hunt

4. Why did many rural people oppose the fox hunting ban?

- a) They thought foxes should be protected
- b) They felt city politicians did not understand countryside life
- c) They believed the government had bigger priorities
- d) They believed fox hunting was already impossible

5. What is trail hunting?

- a) Hunting foxes at night
- b) Hunting without dogs
- c) Following an artificial scent instead of a real fox

d) Hunting along seaside paths

True or False

6. The episode says fox hunting is only about whether British people like foxes.

(True/False)

7. Enclosure helped create countryside that was suitable for fox hunting. (True/False)

8. Oscar Wilde supported fox hunting and described it as noble. (True/False)

9. Hunt saboteurs tried to confuse the hounds and stop hunts from killing animals.

(True/False)

10. Critics believe trail hunting may be used as a way to continue real fox hunting.

(True/False)

Fill in the Blank

11. What happens next is not so harmless. The dogs, all _____ well, will pick up the scent of a fox.

12. Whether it was Meynell alone, or whether he simply became the face of something that was already happening all over the country, it doesn't really matter for the _____ of our story.

13. These efforts had some success, and _____ the groundwork for the idea that fox hunting wasn't untouchable.

14. On bad days, the two sides came to _____. People were injured.

15. The morning after the ban _____ into force, the hunts went out as usual.

Vocabulary Practice

16. What does “**controversial**” mean in the episode?

- a) Very old and traditional
- b) Causing strong disagreement
- c) Easy to understand
- d) Completely legal

17. What does “**livestock**” mean?

- a) Farm animals such as sheep, cows and chickens
- b) Wild animals in forests
- c) Hunting dogs
- d) Animals kept in zoos

18. What does “**pest control**” mean?

- a) Protecting animals from danger
- b) Selling animals at a market
- c) Killing or removing animals that cause problems
- d) Training animals to work on farms

19. What does “**loophole**” mean?

- a) A mistake in a field
- b) A public protest
- c) A type of hunting dog
- d) A gap in a rule or law that people can use to avoid it

20. What does “**smokescreen**” mean in the podcast?

- a) A fire in the countryside
- b) Something that hides the truth
- c) A type of weather
- d) A loud public protest

Answers

1. b) The deer population had fallen greatly
2. a) They killed chickens and lambs
3. d) A small drink given to riders before the hunt
4. b) They felt city politicians did not understand countryside life
5. c) Following an artificial scent instead of a real fox
6. False
7. True
8. False
9. True
10. True
11. being
12. purposes
13. laid
14. blows
15. came
16. b) Causing strong disagreement
17. a) Farm animals such as sheep, cows and chickens
18. c) Killing or removing animals that cause problems
19. d) A gap in a rule or law that people can use to avoid it
20. b) Something that hides the truth